"Later on he [KS: Péron] says: 'On my return, I found that the little yawl of the "Géographe," having gone to fish on Bruny Island, the aborigines had appeared in large numbers, and that, loaded with [42] presents by our companions, they had passed the greater part of the day amongst them (ch. ii. p. 235). Early in the morning of the 31st of January, I landed on Bruny Island. I had already proceeded out of sight of the landing place, when, having rounded a big point, I perceived about twenty savages who were approaching me along the shore: I did not hesitate to retrace my steps, and in thus withdrawing met MM. Heirisson and Bellfin. They offered to return with me to the savages in order to open communications with them. We were already close to the troop, when, suddenly, it entered the forest and disappeared; without attempting to pursue the aborigines, which their agility would have rendered quite useless, we contented ourselves in calling them, showing them different objects, and, above all, in waving our handkerchiefs. At these signs of friendship the troop hesitated a moment, then stopped and decided to await us. We then discovered we had to do with women; there was not a single male amongst them. We were preparing to join them, when one of the oldest, separating herself from her companions, made a sign to us to stop and sit down by calling out loudly, médi-médi (sit down, sit down); she seemed also to beg us to lay aside our weapons, the sight of which frightened them. These preliminary conditions having been fulfilled, the women squatted on their heels, and from that moment appeared to abandon themselves without

reserve to the liveliness of their dispositions, all speaking at once, all questioning us at the same time, appearing often to criticize us and to be laughing at our expense; making, in a word, a thousand gestures and contortions as singular as they were varied. M. Bellefin began to sing, and accompanied himself with lively and animated gestures; the women were immediately silent, observing his gestures with as much attention as they seemed to give to his songs. As soon as a couplet was finished, some applauded by loud shouts, others laughed to splitting, while the younger, and no doubt more timid girls, remained silent, showing nevertheless, by their actions and the expression of their faces, their surprise and their satisfaction. Two or three young girls, of from 15 to 16 years of age, had in the expression of their countenances something most artless, affectionate, and sweet, as if the better qualities of the soul must exist, even in the midst of the savage tribe of the human race, as the especial appanage of youth. Amongst the elder women, some had a coarse and ignoble face; others, fewer in number, a wild and sullen look; but in all, one observed that air of uneasiness and dejection which misfortune and [43] servitude imprint on the forehead of every being who bears the yoke. One only had, among all her companions, preserved great confidence, with much cheerfulness and gaiety. After M. Bellefin had finished his song, she began to imitate his gestures and his tone of voice in a very original and funny way, which greatly amused her companions.

The deference we showed these women, and perhaps also the fresh charms which we owed to their cares, (1) seemed to increase their goodwill and their confidence in us; but nothing, however, could decide them to approach any nearer. At the least movement which we made, or seemed to make, to break the conditions imposed, they all jumped up in a hurry, and took to flight: in order, therefore, to enjoy their presence longer, we were obliged to conform entirely to their wishes. After having loaded them with presents and caresses [sic] we judged it time to return to the landing place; and our Van Diemen's Landers, appearing to be about to go in the same direction, the two troops started; but we were still obliged to give in to these inexorable women, and were condemned to walk along the flat shore, while they marched over the parallel sand-hills. Our route all the time was not less lively than our interview; and from the top of the sand-hills many pleasantries and enticements were sent to us, to which we endeavoured to respond as expressively as was possible. All at once, one of the women uttered a loud cry, which the others repeated with fright: they had discovered our small vessel and our companions. We tried to calm their fears; it was all useless, and the troop was already plunging into the forest

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"1. These women blackened the faces of their visitors."

when the woman, who almost alone had borne the responsibility of our interview, appeared to alter her mind. At her voice there was a movement of hesitation; she spoke for a moment or two to the others; but being, as it seemed to us, unable to persuade them to follow her, she descended alone from the sand-hills, and walking along the shore at some distance in front of us, with much assurance, and even with a kind of pride, she seemed to defy the timidity of her companions. The latter, in their turn, appeared ashamed of their weakness; little by little they became bolder, and decided at last to return to the shore. It was therefore with this numerous and singular escort that we arrived at our ships, near to which, by a chance difficult to foresee, all the husbands of these poor women had been assembled for some minutes. In spite of the most unequivocal proofs of the goodwill and generosity of our fellow-[44]countrymen, they still preserved a disturbed and sullen expression; their looks were wild and threatening; and in their whole attitude one distinguished an air of constraint, and malevolence, and treachery, which they in vain sought to hide; it seemed as though they were mortified at the failure of their various attacks, (1) while at the same time they dreaded our vengeance. A few days later

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"1. The savages had on several occasions thrown spears at Péron's party, they themselves being hidden in the forest."

I had the pleasure of meeting the same woman who has so often been mentioned. I then learnt that her name was Arrà-Màïdà. M. Petit drew her portrait; therein will be noted will be noted that character of assurance and dignity which so eminently distinguished this woman among all her companions' (ch. ii. pp. 250-256)."

"...they did not treat their women well. La Billardière states (II. ch. x. p. 59), 'It gave us great pain to see these poor women condemned to such severe toil. We often entreated their husbands to at least take a share in their labour, but always in vain. They remained constantly near the fire, feasting on the best bits.' And Péron, describing a meeting with twenty female aborigines, says, 'They were nearly all covered with scars, the miserable results of the bad treatment of their [55] brutal husbands.' These women accompanied him to his boat, being heavily laden with fish, and here they found their husbands. The women appeared dismayed; 'their fierce husbands looked at them with anger and fury, which did not tend to reassure them. After having deposited the results of their fishing at the feet of these men, who immediately divided it up without giving them any, they proceeded to group themselves behind their husbands' (ch. xii. pp. 252-256)."

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"La Billardière mentions an incident which may tend to show that the women were chaste: 'Two of the young girls followed the different windings of the shore without mistrust, at a distance from the other natives, with three of our sailors, when these took the opportunity to treat them with a degree of freedom, which was received in a very different manner from which they had hoped. The young women immediately fled to the rocks most advanced in the sea, and appeared ready to leap into it and swim away if our men had followed them. They presently repaired to the place where we were assembled with the other savages; but it seems they did not disclose this adventure, for the most perfect harmony continued to prevail between us' (II. ch. x. p. 51). Bass thought the men jealous of their women. He mentions encountering a native Tasmanian whose two women, on Bass's approach, ran away, and who, on being requested to show them his hut, assented, but led the way to it with so many stoppages, that they, fearing to lose the tide, parted from him, and returned to their boat. 'The most probable reason of his unwillingness to be their guide seemed his not having a male companion near him; and his fearing that if he took them to his women, their charms might induce them to run off with them, a jealousy very common with the natives of the continent' (ch. xvi. p. 187)."

"Occasionally they seem to have spared women; thus Backhouse mentions the following incident: 'We passed the remains of a hut that was burnt about two years ago, by the aborigines of the Ouse or Big River district. An old man named Clark lost his life in it, but a young woman escaped; she rushed from the fire and fell on her knees before the natives, one of whom extinguished the flames which had caught her clothes, and beckoned to her to go away. They killed a woman on the hill behind the hut. A few weeks after they surrounded the house of G. Dixon, who received a spear through his thigh, in running from a barn to his house' (p. 30). Calder states (Wars, p. 56): 'They [the aborigines] were naturally opposed to taking the life of a female.' ... A Mrs. Cunningham having been murdered by Le-ner-e-gle-lang-e-ner, chief of the Piper's River tribe, 'a Cape Portland native, who was staying at the time with the Piper's River fellows, ... when he heard of the death of this woman, spoke very disapprovingly of it, adding that "the men of his tribe never killed a white woman."' If, on the one hand, there was an inclination of the part of some males to spare white females, so there was on the other hand a disposition on the part of the Tasmanian females to save life where possible. We have already seen in this chapter two cases where the native women did so save life; and with regard to the murder of Mr. Parker and Captain Thomas, Calder says: 'The demeanour of the women... was only what they always displayed on occasions like this.

They were seldom present at a fight, unless it was an unexpected one, being always left behind, as many have thought, for their safety, but really because their presence was embarrassing to their husbands; for, with rare exceptions, they were against excessive violence being done; and it would not be difficult to give instances where their interposition in stopping it was more successful than it was at this time' (Wars, p. 83)."

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"In spite of Lloyd's experience, there were doubtless exceptional cases when monogamy prevailed, for on one occasion during an interview La Billardière reports: 'Two of the stoutest of the party were sitting in the midst of their children, and each had two women by his side. They informed us by signs that these were their wives, and gave us a fresh proof that polygamy is established among them. The other woman, who had only one husband, was equally careful to let us know it. It would be difficult to say which are the happiest; as the most laborious of their domestic occupations devolve upon them, the former had the advantage of a partner in them, which perhaps might sufficiently compensate their having only a share in their husband's affections' (II. ch. x. p. 60). Dove considers that from the very fact of polygamy prevailing, the condition of the women must be abject (I. p. 252)."

"...La Billardière's statement (II. ch. x. p. 61) that the women showed the greatest subordination to their husbands: 'It appeared that the women were careful to avoid giving their husbands any occasion for jealousy.' 'The men are very indolent, and make the women their beasts of burden, and do all their servile operations, such as cooking, etc. ... While the men are taking it easy in front, the women follow at some short distance behind, sweltering under a load of one or two children on their backs, a couple of puppy dogs in their arms, and a variety of miscelaneous articles slung around them. The men are extremely selfish; if, after being short of food, one kills a kangaroo, he does not divide it with the others of the party, but, after his wife has cooked it, and taken her place behind his back, he satisfies himself with the choicest parts, handing her from time to time the half-devoured pieces over his shoulder; this he does with an air of the greatest condescension, without turning round' (Davies, p. 415)."

"Lloyd's account is very similar (p. 44): 'Hard labour is the matrimonial inheritance of the poor gin [wife]. In travelling, the task of carrying her infant, the food, and all the worldly goods and chattels of the family, devolved upon the wretched woman; whilst her lord, with head erect, unburdened except with the spear, the shield, and waddie, walked proudly in advance of his frail tottering slave;' and so is Calder's (Journ. p. 20): 'They [the men] did not allow their wives to participate in the sport,... they acted only as drudges to carry their spears and the game; but the fishing (for shell fish only...) was resigned wholly to them. The men considered it beneath them, and left it, and all other troublesome services, to them, who, in nine cases out of ten, [126] were no better than slaves. If a storm came on unexpectedly, the men would sit down while the women built huts over them, in which operation, as in all others of a menial nature, the men took no part.'"

"We have just seen above that in the use of their floats a native swims on each side, holding the float with one hand. Calder says (Journ. p. 23): 'Some of the men, unlike the women, were not always good swimmers, though most of them were perfect.' La Billardière 'wishing to know whether these islanders were expert swimmers, one of our officers jumped into the water, and dived several times; but it was in vain that he invited them to follow his example. They are very good divers, however, ...for it is by diving that they procure a considerable part of their food' (II. ch. x. pp. 51-52). Later on he was more successful, and thus describes a diving scene: 'Hitherto we had but a faint idea of the pains the women take to procure the food.... They took each a basket, and were followed by their daughters, who did the same. Getting on the rocks that projected into the sea, they plunged from them to the bottom in search of shell-fish. When they had been down some time, we became very uneasy on their account. ...At length, however, they appeared, and convinced us they were capable of remaining under water twice as long as our ablest divers. An instant was sufficient for them to take breath, and then they dived again. This they did repeatedly till their baskets were nearly full' (II. ch. x. p. 57)."

"Backhouse speaks thus of their diving powers (p. 168): 'Some of the women went into the water...to take crayfish. These women seem quite at home in the water, and frequently immerse their faces to enable them to see objects at the bottom. When they discover the object of their search, they dive, often using the long stems of the kelp, to enable them to reach the bottom.' [165] Backhouse mentions that 'two white men being in danger of drowning on a raft, some of the native women... swam to the raft, and begged the men to get upon their backs, and they would convey them to the shore; but the poor men refused, being overcome with fear' (p. 147); and on another occasion that 'two women waded and swam from Green Island to the Settlement--a distance of three miles' (p. 89). Mr. Meredith mentions that 'a native women, to avoid being captured, rushed into the sea, where she swam and dived for some time, before she could be induced to come ashore' (p. 205). Davies speaks of the women 'being generally, if not at all times, the divers' (p. 413). With the exception therefore of Calder, no writer speaks of the men as swimmers."